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SUBJECT: BAN PROPOSES "PAUSE" IN GOOD OFFICES MISSION

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11. (SBU) Summary: On December 5, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon convened a meeting of the Group of Friends of Burma and revealed that he received "no productive response" to proposals, which included his own visit, from the Burmese regime. He proposed a "pause" to recalibrate the overall framework of the good offices mission and pressed ASEAN countries directly to use their influence on the regime. Special Advisor Ibrahim Gambari listed three short-term priorities for the group: 1) encouraging concrete results from the regime, 2) keeping Aung Sun Suu Kyi (ASSK) engaged, and 3) bridging divergent perspectives on the situation in the international community. ASEAN countries plus Japan, India and China rejected Ban's proposed pause and stressed patience and perseverance. The P-3 plus Australia and Norway agreed a pause may be necessary, highlighting recent arrests and the general lack of progress since riots in September 12007. France and the U.S. raised follow-up action in the Council, which was challenged by Singapore and Vietnam as "unproductive." End Summary.

12. (SBU) SYG Ban expressed frustration at the lack of progress in Burma, noting that key political issues -- the release of political prisoners and dialogue -- remain unaddressed. He challenged Friends to think creatively and asked them to consider using the "tools" at their disposal (or providing Ban with their "toolbox") to engage the regime, including possible incentives. Ban said the international community's capacity to effectively implement the good offices mission depended on bridging gaps in perspectives. He raised both the 3 December letter signed by 112 former presidents and prime ministers and another signed by 211 Asian parliamentarians stressing the need for progress as well as Ban's personal engagement. Ban lamented that there was little indication for optimism, citing recent arrests as "contrary to the spirit of progress." Ban suggested that the good offices mission had reached a stage where it needed to "pause and recalibrate its overall framework." He urged ASEAN directly to be more active and remarked that it was his impression ASEAN members were not doing all they could to pressure the regime.

13. (SBU) Special Advisor Gambari added that the good offices mission was predicated on building upon positive, tangible results, which were not forthcoming. He remarked that the Burmese must take primary responsibility for change in Burma and suggested three key questions for the Friends' immediate focus: 1) how do we encourage the regime to express progress in concrete results, 2) how do we keep ASSK engaged in the process, and 3) how do we "bridge the division" in the international community on the situation in Burma?

14. (SBU) ASEAN countries plus Japan, India and China rejected Ban's proposed "pause" of the good offices mission, equating it with giving up. They repeated their long held stance that

the good offices mission was a process and progress would require time and patience. Singapore, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam and India urged Ban to redouble good offices mission efforts and replace negative pressure with incentives. Responding to the SYG's plea to ASEAN countries to do more, Singapore and Indonesia claimed they were doing all they could with the little influence they had. Indonesian PR Natalegawa added that "less noise on our part does not mean inaction," since ASEAN approaches the issue in a "low-key, effective way." In a bridging role, Natalegawa said that engagement and the sanctions/pressure approach were not mutually exclusive and called for tolerance of different approaches as long as they don't cancel each other out. Both Singapore and Vietnam challenged the effectiveness of Council attention on Burma, claiming Council pressure was "unproductive."

15. (SBU) Chinese DPR Liu opened his comments intimating that Ban called the meeting in response to pressure from group members. He claimed nothing had changed in Burma and Ban should not change the good offices mission in response to pressure, including the letters Ban referenced. Liu hoped Burma would continue progressing in a positive direction, highlighting the adoption of the new constitution, upcoming elections and movement on the 7-step roadmap. He remarked that the political situation was complicated, as Burma had over twelve insurgent groups and progress should be measured through a historical lens. Indian Political Counsellor added that there had also been progress on Gambari's 5-point plan. Both China and India stressed that negative pressure is counterproductive and incentives must be given by those who use pressure. Beyond a request for clarification of "pause"

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of the good offices mission, Russian PR Churkin did not speak.

16. (SBU) The P-3 plus Australia, Norway and the representatives from the European Union and European Commission all shared Ban's frustration and agreed on the lack of progress in Burma. All also agreed that the recent arrests and extreme sentencing of activists clearly indicated the regime was moving in defiance of both the Council and the international community. UK PR Sawers said that in its current state, the good offices mission was a "charade" and Gambari's efforts were like those of a "hamster in a cage." The UK, France, EU and the EC suggested they were not opposed to incentives if there was progress. Ambassador DiCarlo remarked that the U.S. could not consider incentives until there was significant progress on the political front. DiCarlo also explained that "pausing" was not giving up but recognizing the need to change course while holding the good offices in reserve, which was supported by France, UK, and Australia. She emphasized the need to move beyond stagnation and deterioration, and raised the possibility of addressing the issue in the Council, which France supported. Khahilzad